

Laid Off Cargill Workers Return In AR

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SPRINGDALE, Ark. (AP) — The Cargill Inc. plant that was the subject of two recalls of ground turkey hasn't set a date for resuming production of the product but has brought back 40 of 130 workers the company laid off.

The Springdale plant has about 1,200 employees and — at full production — processes 7 million pounds of finished turkey products each week, ranging from whole birds to turkey breasts to ground products.

The plant halted ground turkey production Sept. 12 after back-to-back salmonella incidents that were linked to one death and 129 illnesses across the country. Cargill recalled 36 million pounds of ground turkey.

Cargill spokesman Michael Martin told the Springdale Morning News (<http://bit.ly/u6Nohn>) that the recalled workers are filling positions that have come open in areas of the plant other than in ground turkey production.

Martin said the company is working with federal food safety officials to restart ground turkey production. In the meantime, the company is enduring \$2.4 million per week in lost production, totaling about \$17 million so far.

"Our goal is to resume ground turkey production at Springdale as soon as possible, so we are not retooling to produce different products in lieu of ground turkey," Martin said. "We have not increased whole bird production because there is no need — we typically process all available turkey inventory and have no surplus birds."

The plant, when at full production, processes 7 million pounds of finished turkey products each week ranging from whole birds to turkey breasts to ground products.

Frank Jones, consultant with Performance Poultry in Springdale, said live bird processors are vulnerable to salmonella outbreaks because the pathogen coexists among bird populations.

Food safety advocates say plants use obsolete systems for testing that leaves too much room for error.

Chris Waldrop, director of food policy at the Consumer Federation, said the testing standards are too low for ground turkey product. Now with pending federal budget restraints, he said the agencies overseeing food safety are likely stretched too thin, which may lead to greater numbers of recalls.

The need for faster, yet highly reliable processes to detect pathogens has never been greater given the recent deadly food outbreaks, according to Paul Repetto, chief executive officer of Ohio-based Crystal Diagnostics.

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Repetto said his company has developed a method of testing that can detect multiple pathogens in less than 30 minutes using liquid crystals. The process is being tested with leading food companies in the field and in laboratories this fall.

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